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Ver Hage

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(54) **REMOVABLE CAP ASSEMBLY**

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U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2003/0097994 A1 May 29, 2003

Related U.S. Application Data

(62) Division of application No. 09/652,737, filed on Aug. 31,
2000.

(51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **A01K 7/00**

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **119/72; 220/293; 215/318**

(58) **Field of Search** **215/44, 45, 318,**
215/329, 341; 220/293, 288; 119/72, 72.5

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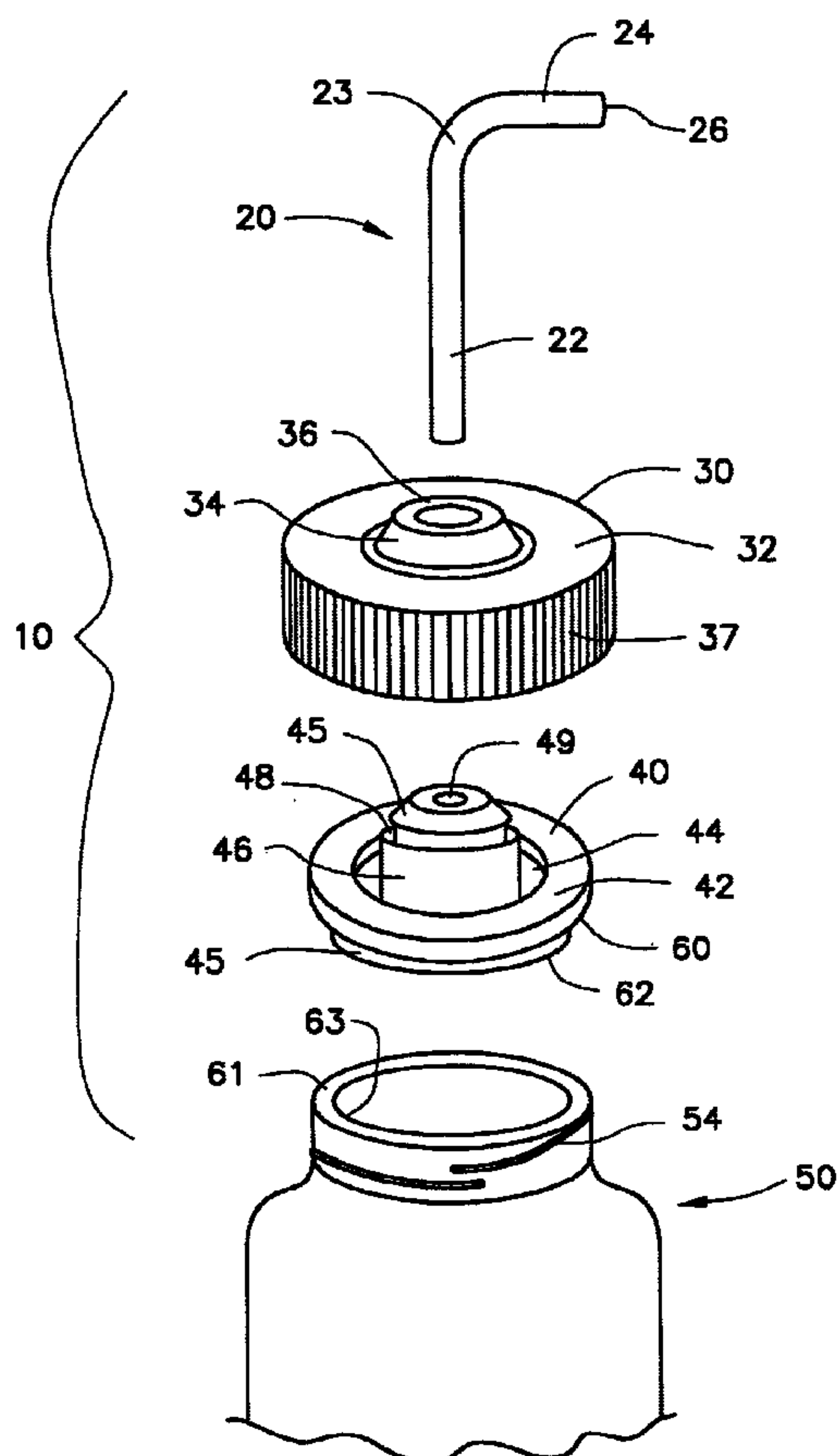
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention provides a removable cap and bottle assembly having a cap having a curved side wall having an inner surface and an outer surface where the inner surface has at least two threads disposed thereon. A bottle is provided having a mouth portion having an inner surface and an outer surface. The outer surface has at least two threads disposed thereon corresponding to the threads disposed on the inner surface of the side wall of the cap, so that when the cap is screwed on to the mouth of the bottle, a compression seal is formed along an entire circumference of the cap and the bottle with less than a full turn of the cap.

3 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



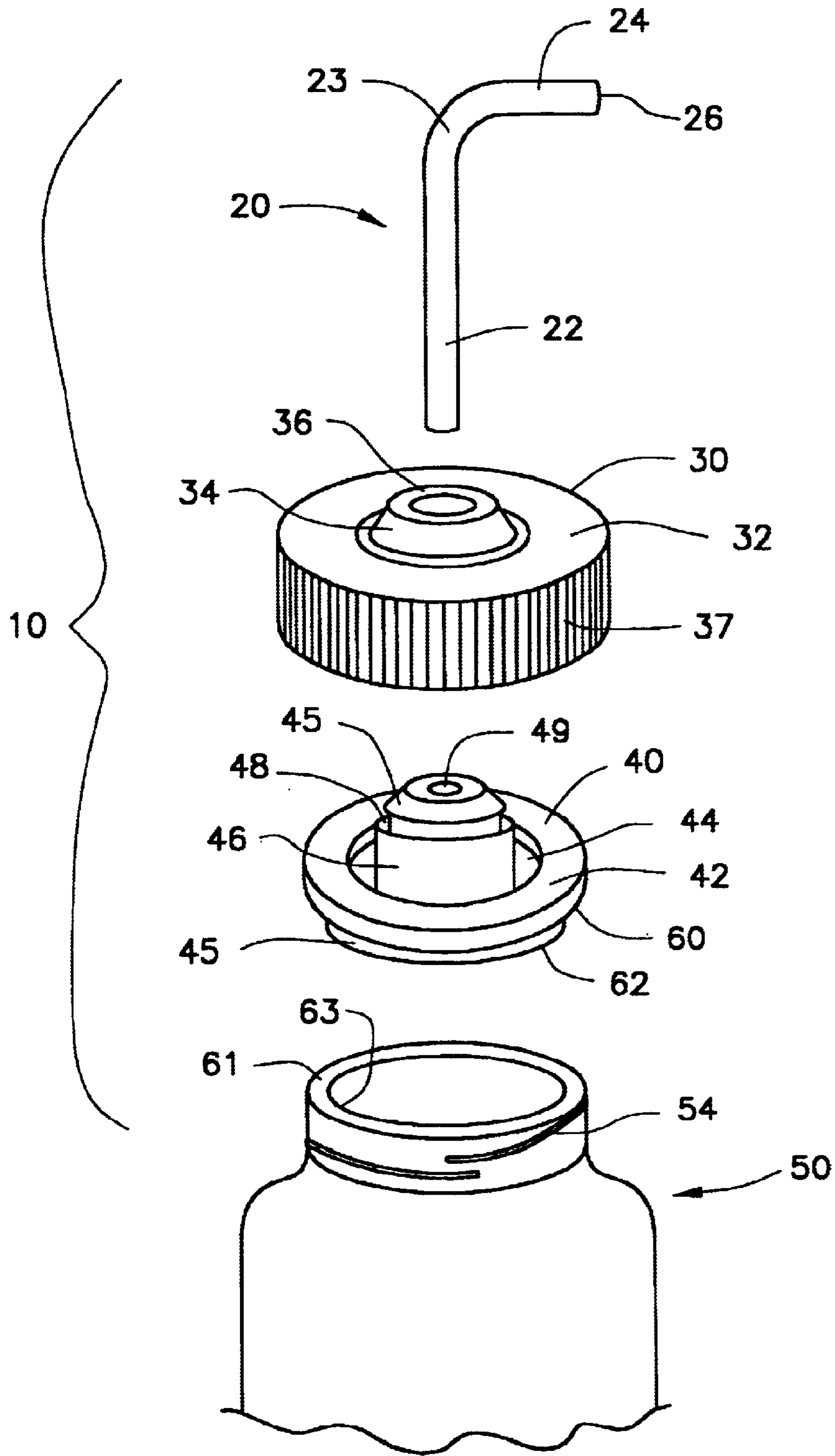


FIG. 1

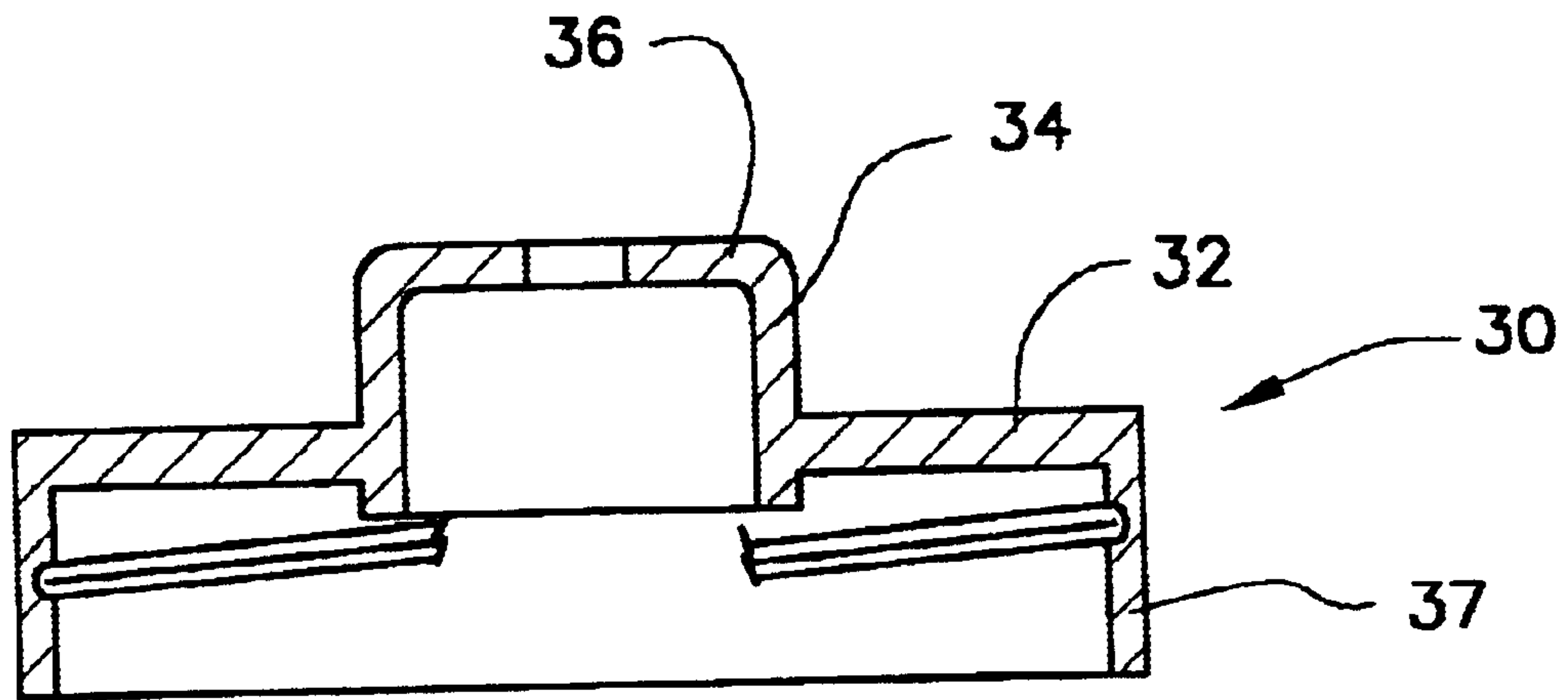


FIG. 2A

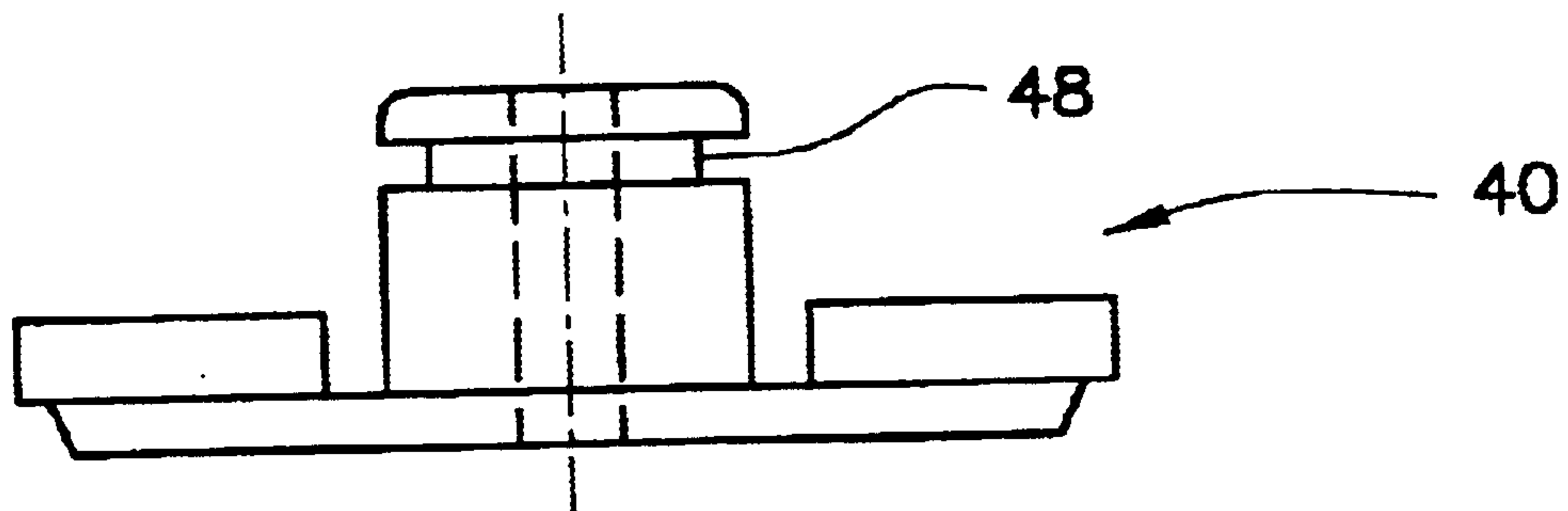


FIG. 2B

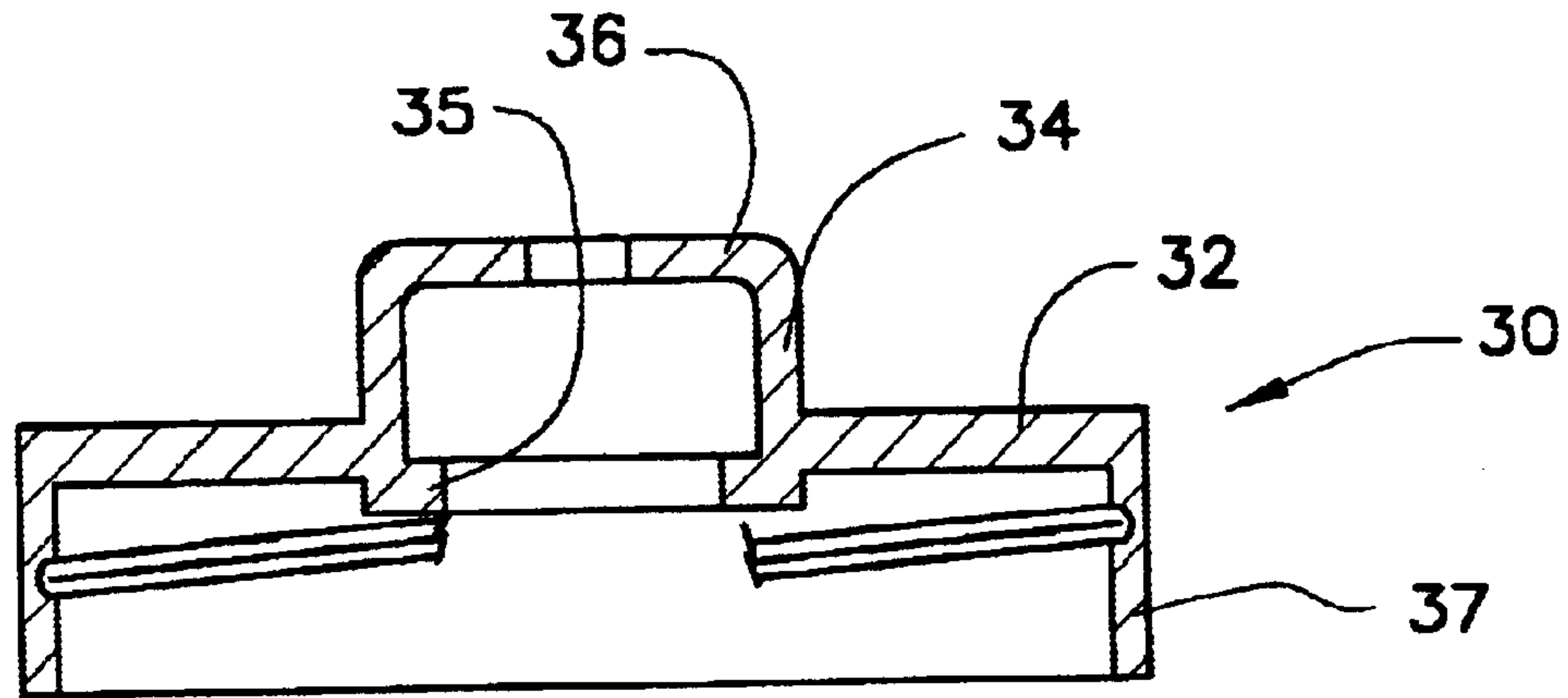


FIG. 3A

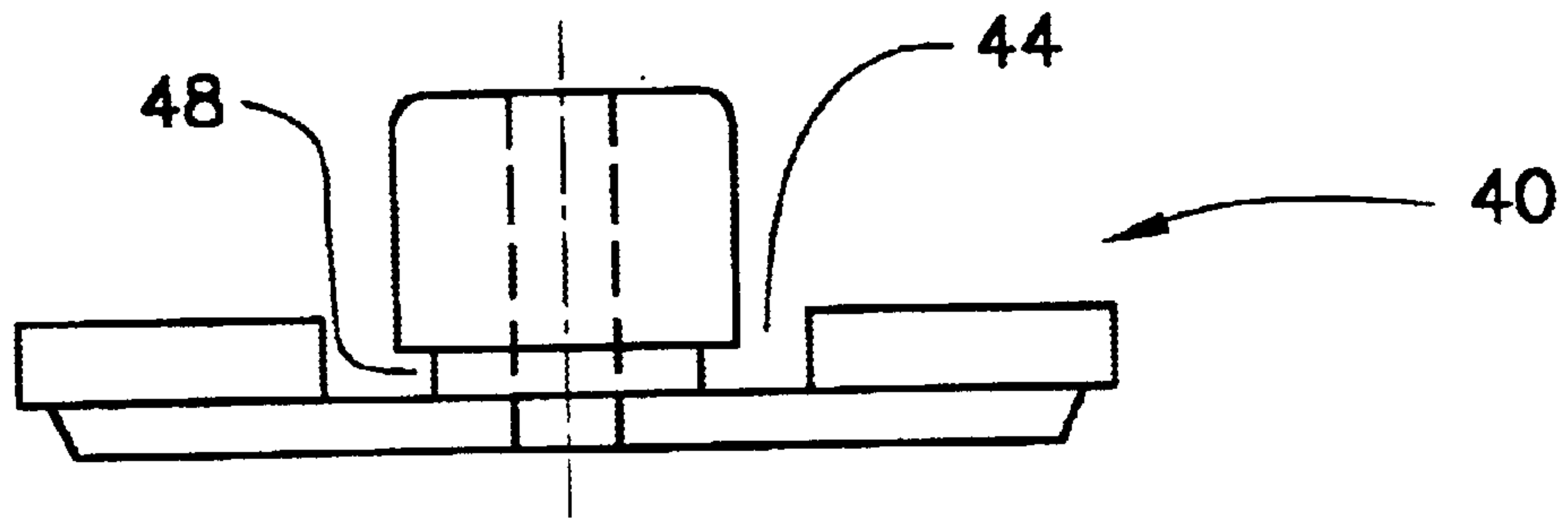


FIG. 3B

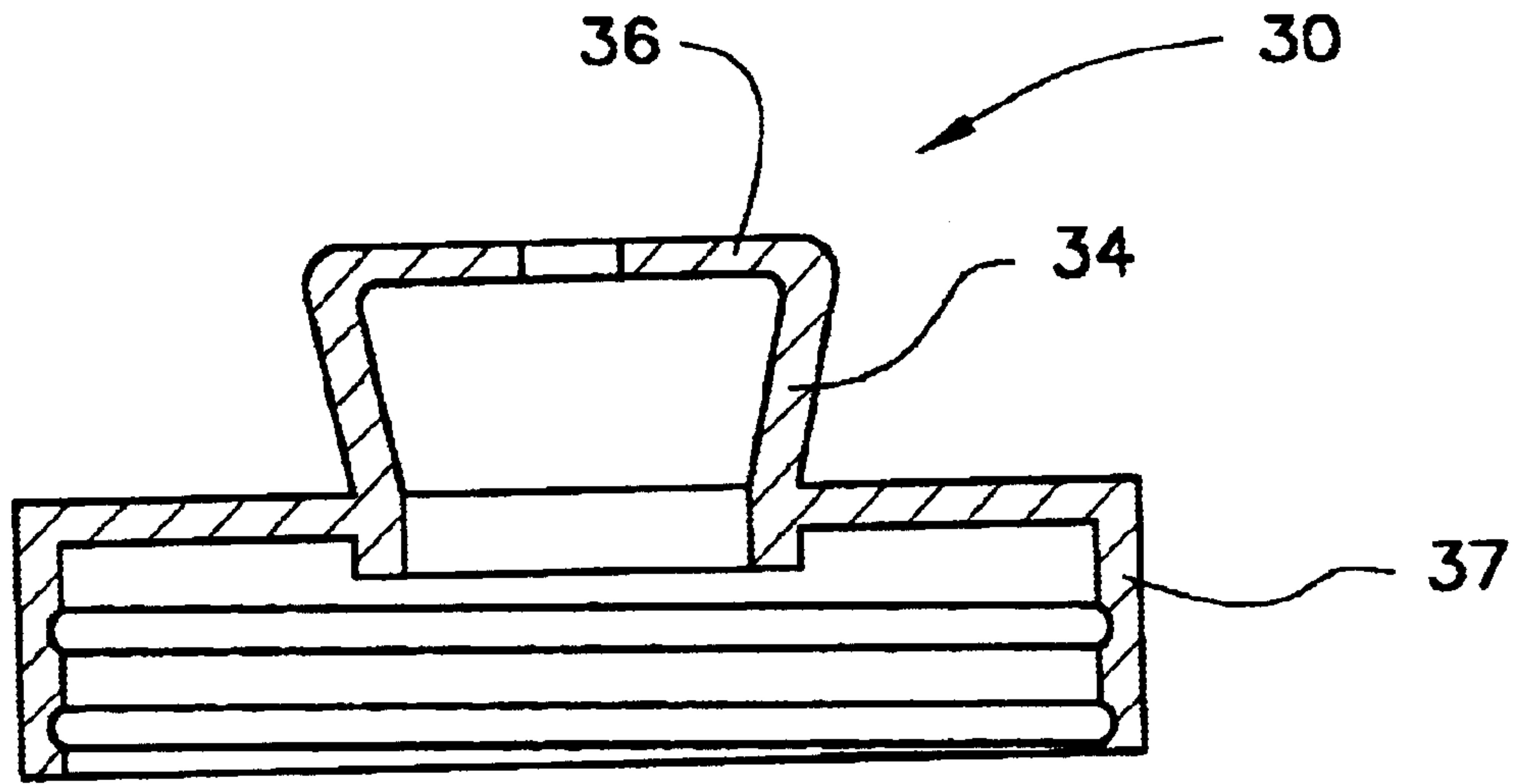


FIG. 4A

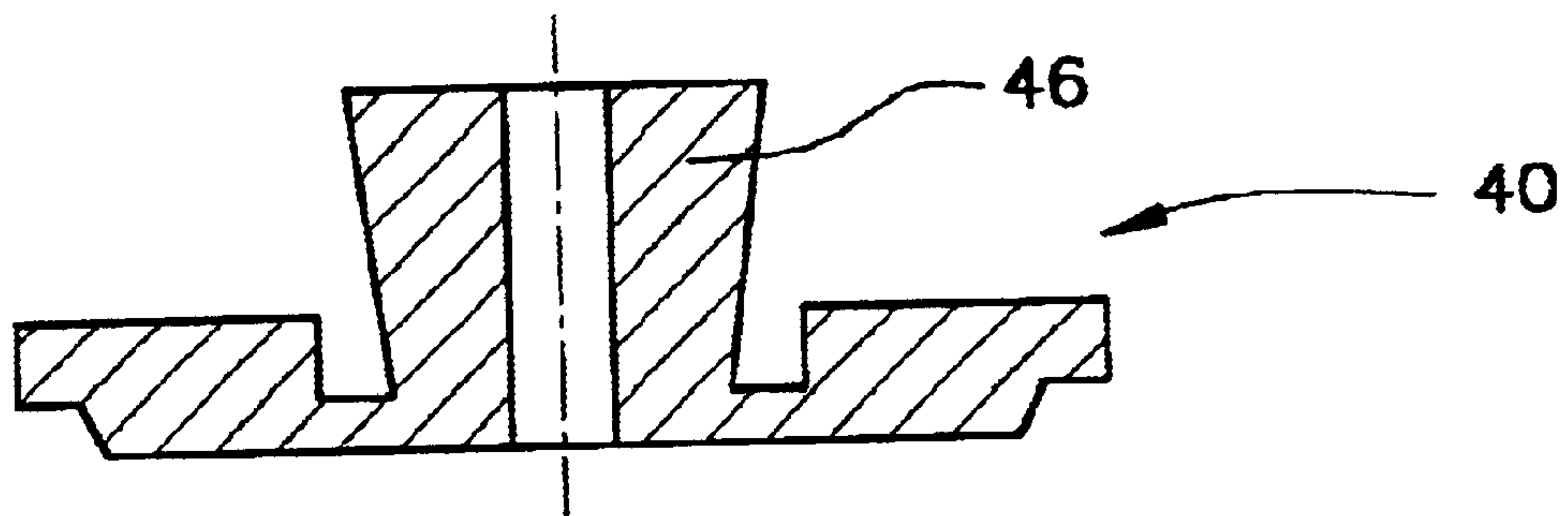


FIG. 4B

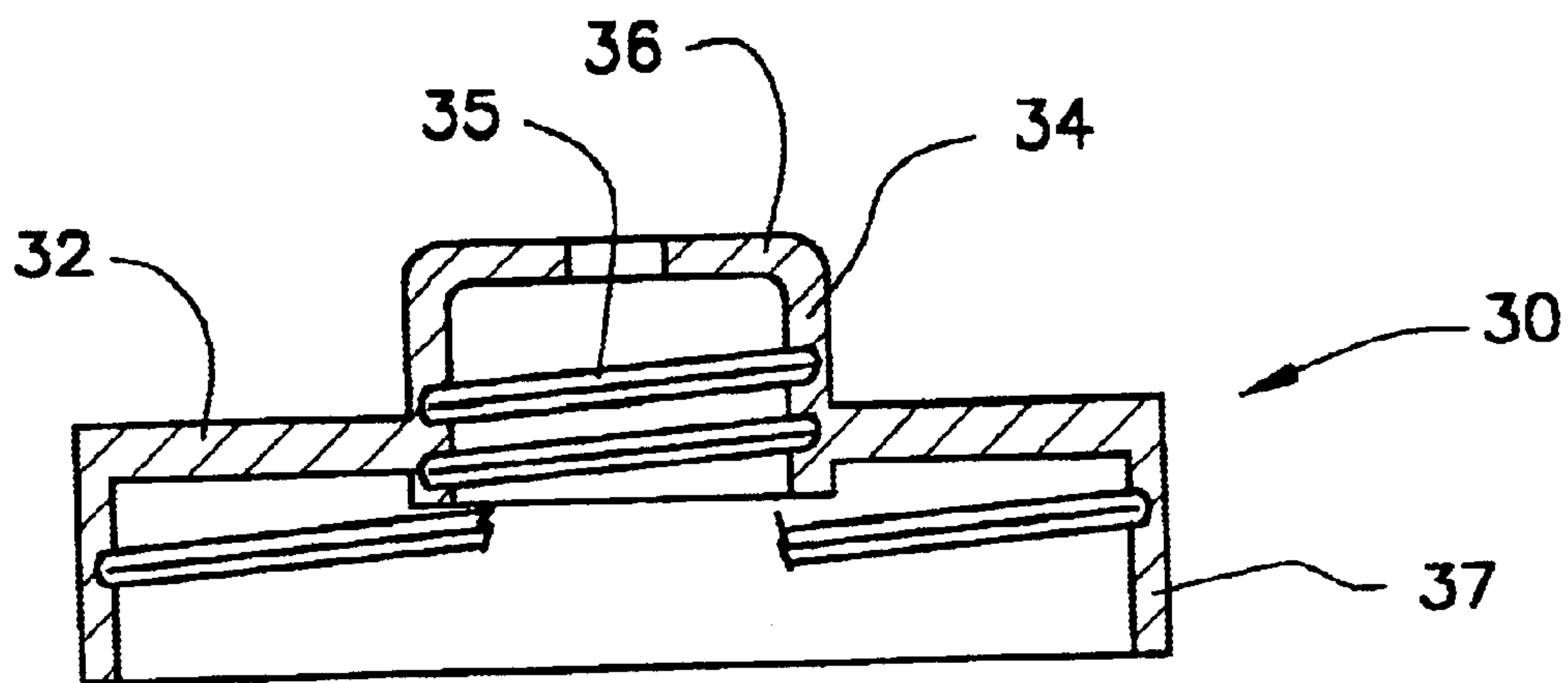


FIG. 5A

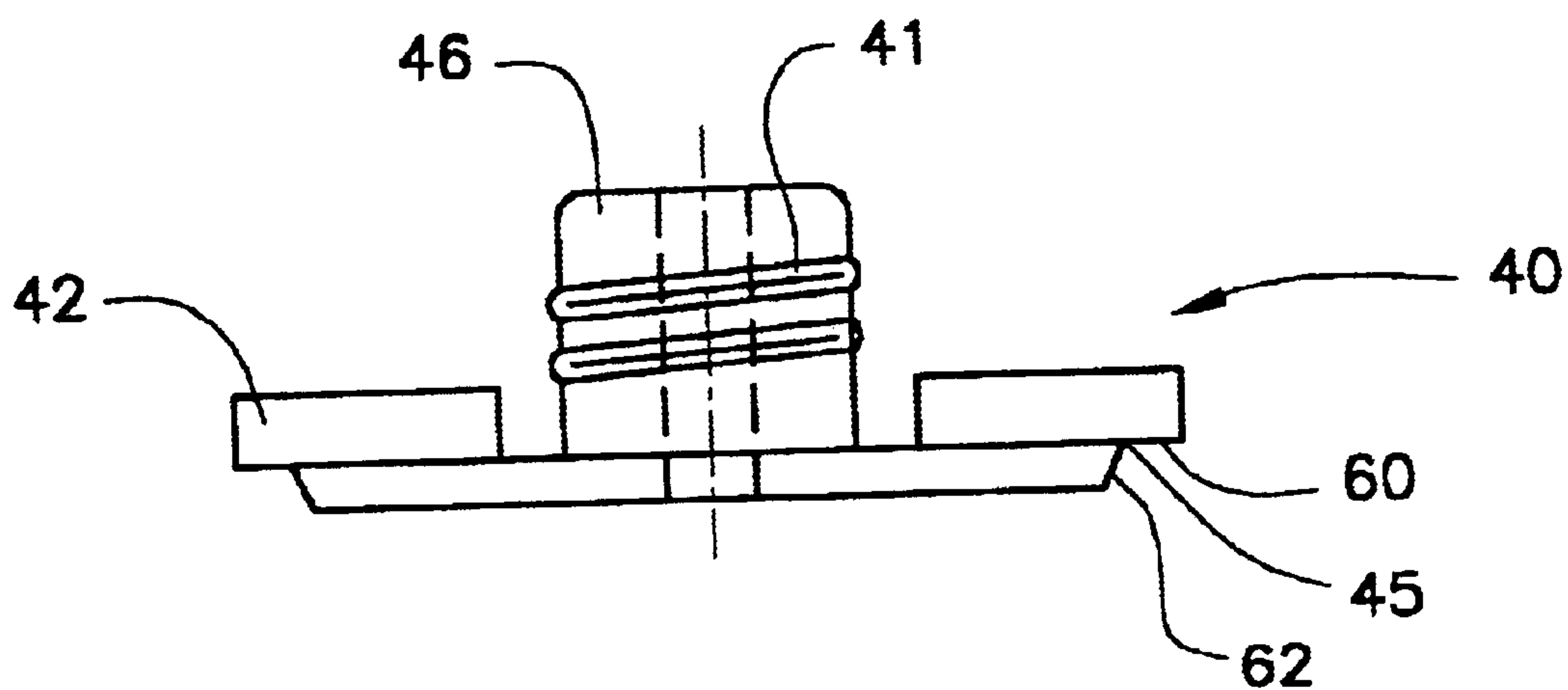


FIG. 5B

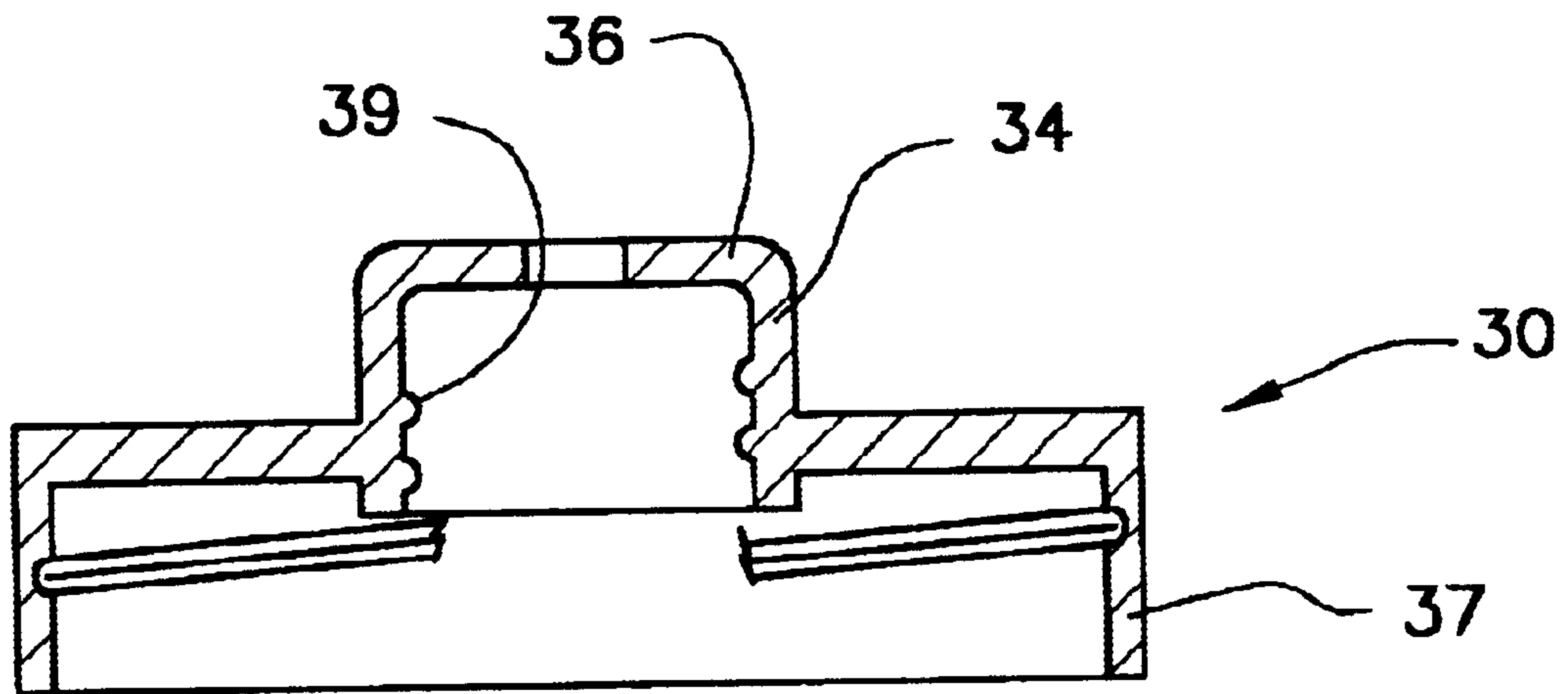


FIG. 6A

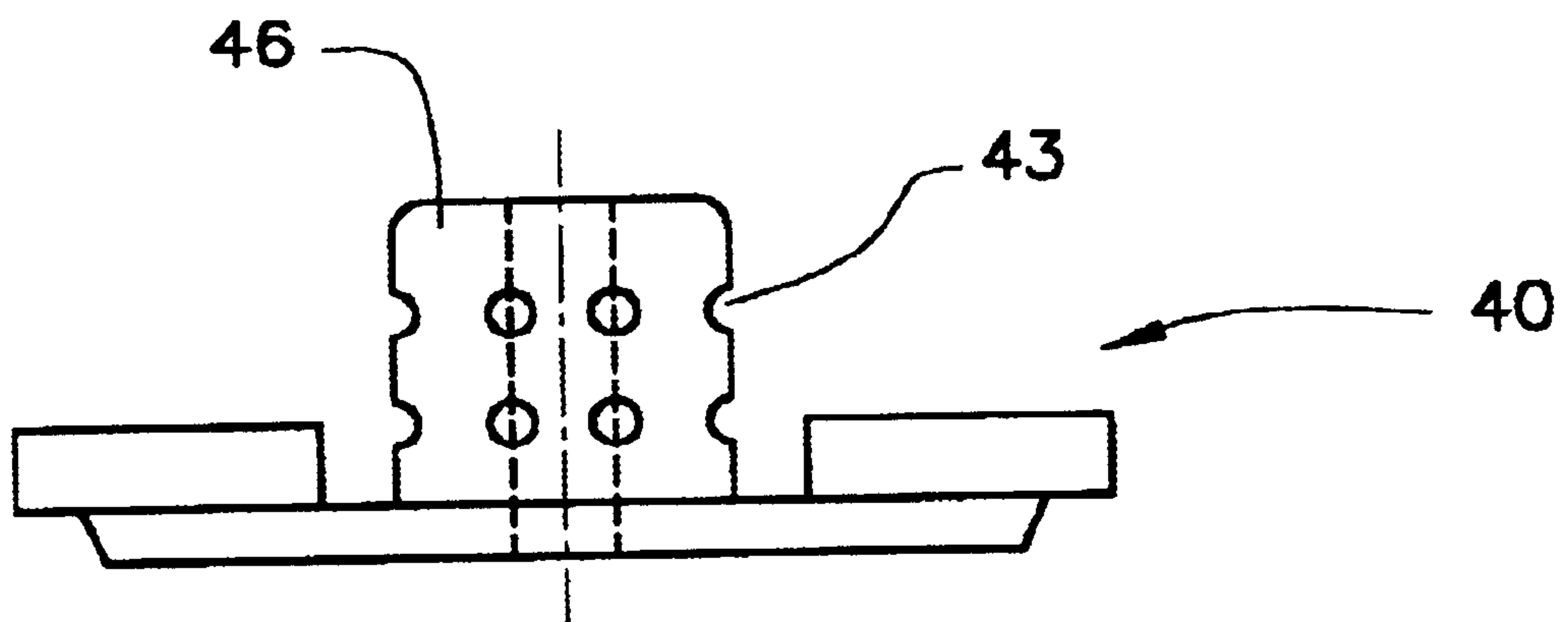


FIG. 6B

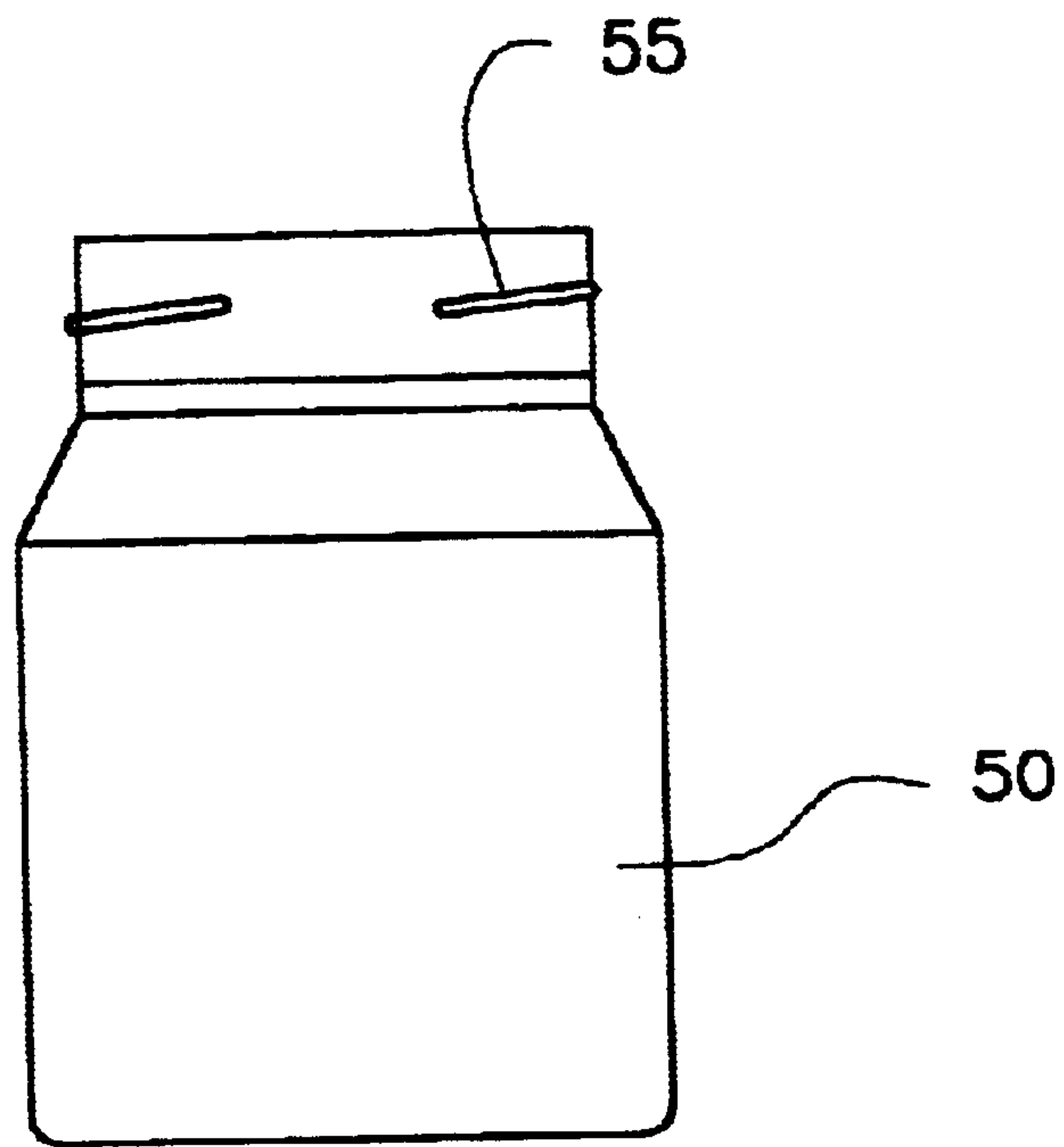


FIG. 7A

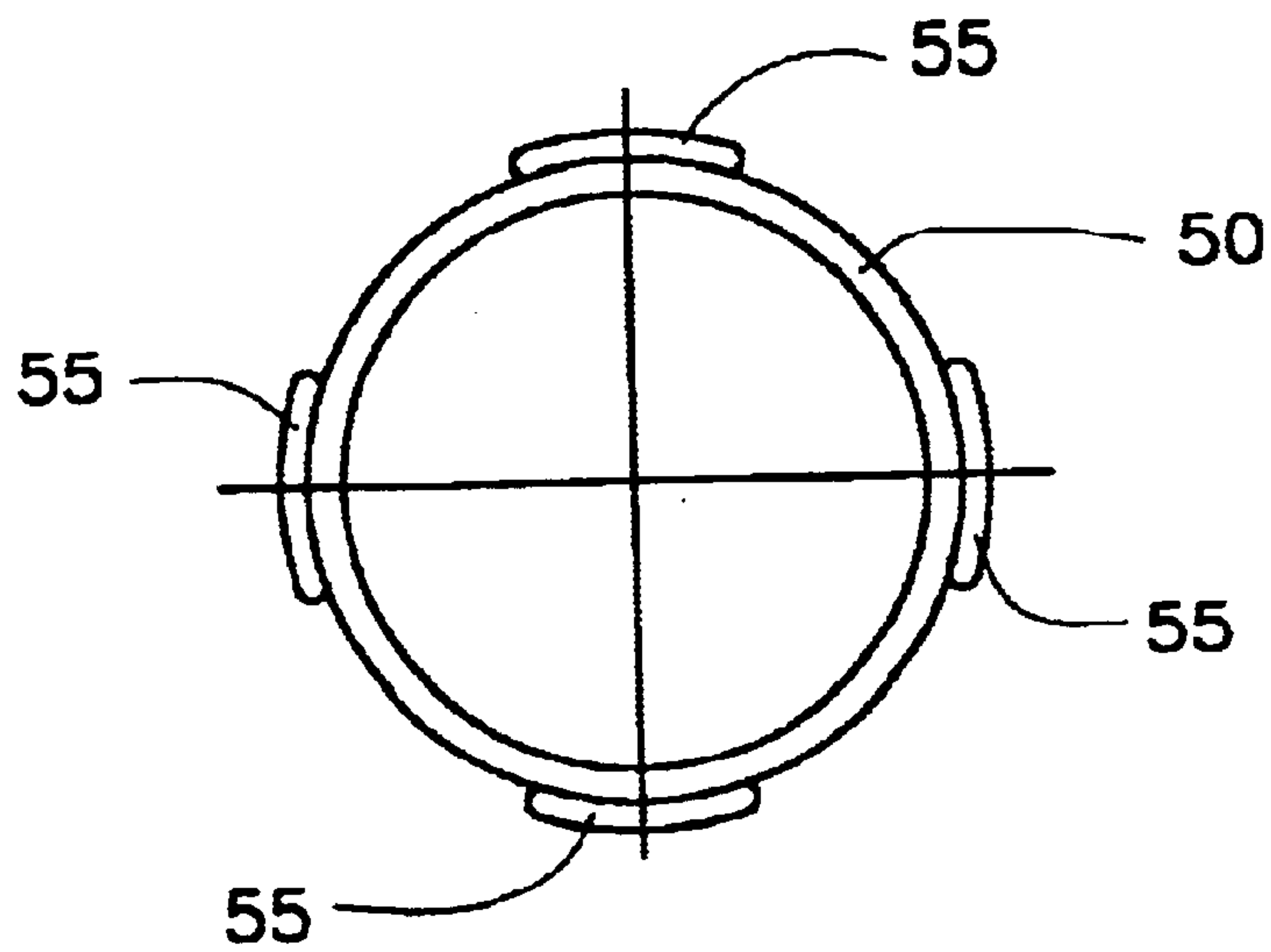


FIG. 7B

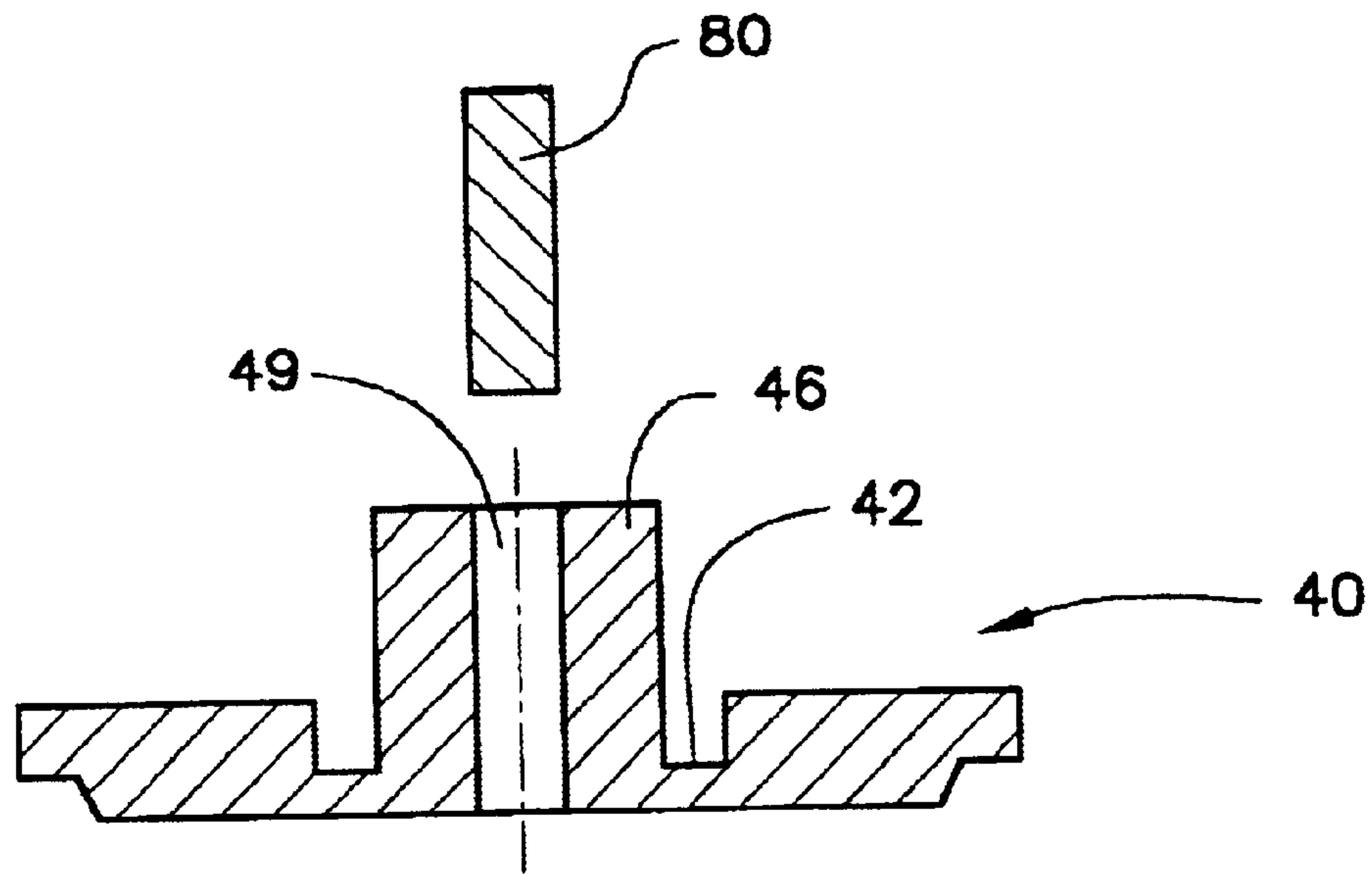


FIG. 8A

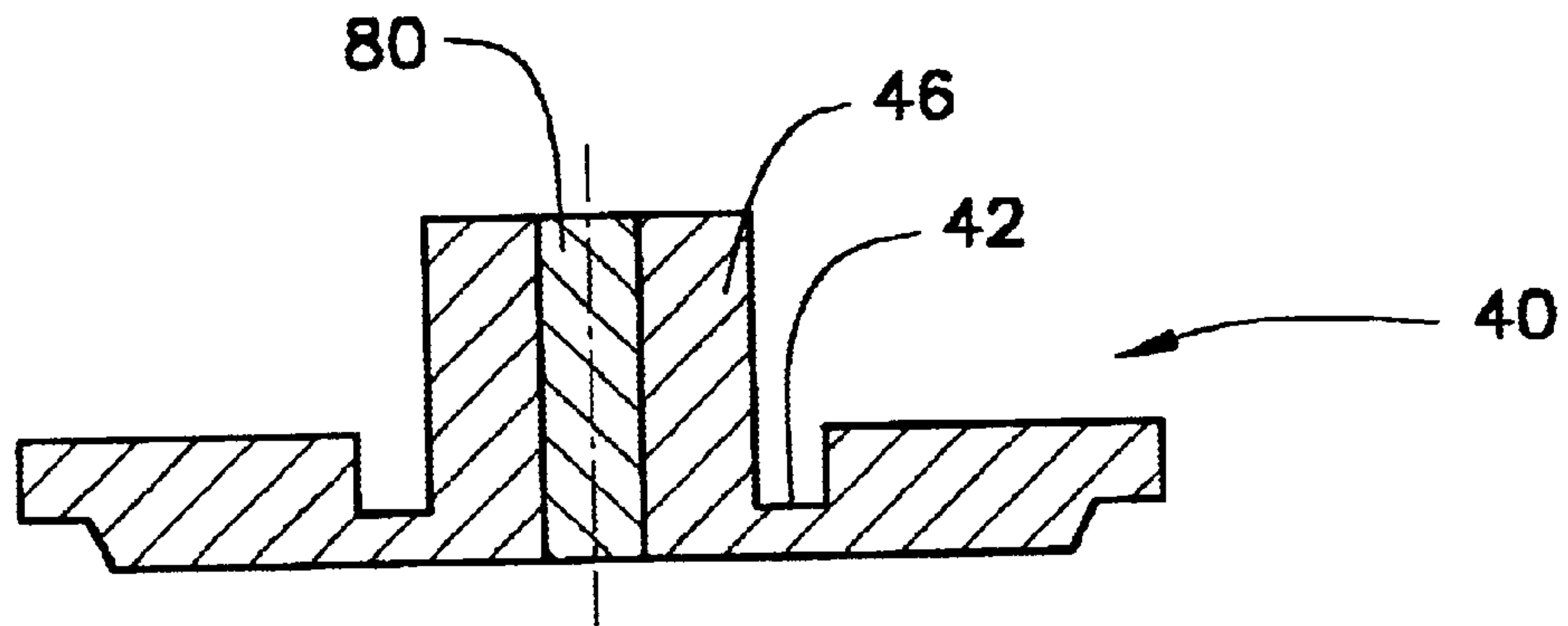


FIG. 8B

REMOVABLE CAP ASSEMBLY**RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a divisional application of Applicant's co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/652,737, entitled, "Removable Cap Assembly", filed on Aug. 31, 2000, the entirety of which is incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to an improved removable cap assembly for an animal feeding bottle.

BACKGROUND

Small rodents such as mice, rats, guinea pigs, and hamsters are used in scientific research and they are sometimes kept as pets by children. Typically, such animals are held in small cages where they are provided with nesting material along with food and water. Solid food is kept in a feeding device. So that the cage remains dry and relatively orderly, liquids, such as water and medicines, are usually stored in a special bottle with a dispensing device that allows small portions to be released to the animal.

A common type of dispensing device, widely used in the laboratory animal industry, is a sipper tube that is connected to a bottle filled with liquid. The tube points downward and is accessible to the animal. Often the hole in the tube is relatively small and, therefore, surface tension, along with a partial vacuum that is created in the bottle, prevents liquid from flowing freely from the bottle. Other sipper tubes include ball bearings disposed therein to block the hole at the bottom of the tube. The bearing is free to move and when it does, it allows liquid to exit in a controlled manner.

In the prior art, it is well known that a sipper tube such as the one just described can be coupled to a bottle with a stopper made of rubber, neoprene, or another similar material. The stopper is placed in the mouth of the bottle where it is held by friction fit. Similarly, a hole in the stopper is dimensioned to hold the sipper tube by friction fit. With the bottle inverted, the sipper tube is accessible to an animal, and limited amounts of liquid can flow out of the bottle as needed.

The use of a simple friction fit between the stopper and the bottle has at least one major limitation. Because the bottle is inverted, the weight of the liquid tends to loosen the stopper. Furthermore, the stopper is loosened by vibrations and motion caused by an animal using the bottle. These loosening effects may eventually cause the stopper to come apart from the bottle, allowing liquid to escape. In some cases, animals attempt and sometimes succeed in removing stoppers from the bottle. In order to avoid these potentialities, stoppers are usually inserted into the bottle by hand with relatively high force. However, this action may cause health problems, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, for a person who must repetitively insert stoppers into bottles. After all, typical laboratories utilize large quantities of these bottles and stoppers.

One example of a removable cap assembly is shown in U.S. Pat. No. 6,002,440 to Murray et al. This invention makes steps to overcome the limitations discussed above of standard, friction fit stoppers. The patent teaches an assembly that includes a stopper which has a neck disposed between two lip structures. The neck is dimensioned to receive a flange that is disposed on a cap. Finally, a sipper tube is provided which is positioned within a hole in the

stopper, to extend through the opening. The patent also teaches a cap that needs to be turned only 180 degrees in order to seal the bottle.

While the device described in this patent helps to solve some problems inherent in prior art, at least one major limitation is intrinsic in its design. The lip and neck structure, which is held in place by a single circumferential flange, tends to lack rigidity. Thus, the problem remains that the sipper tube can be wriggled, allowing leakage of the bottle contents or the removal of the sipper tube. Moreover, wriggling of the sipper tube can allow air to enter the bottle, eliminating the partial vacuum and causing liquid to flow freely from the sipper tube. An additional concern with this prior art device is that the upper lip is exposed on the outside of the cap. The lip tends to collect dirt and germs which can be harmful to the animals or those handling the bottle assemblies.

Another problem with this prior art device is manner in which the seal is crated after the cap is turned 180 degrees. The 180 degree turn is achieved by having a single continuous thread on both the bottle and cap. The cap bottoms out after the cap has turned 180 degrees. As such, the cap is compressed along only half of the sealing surface.

Thus, what is needed is an improved removable cap assembly that overcomes prior art limitations. Specifically, these limitations include the rigidity and security with which the sipper tube is held by a stopper in the bottle. Additionally, problems with regard to cleanliness stem from design features in the prior art.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is one object of the present invention to provide an improved removable cap assembly for use in conjunction with a bottle.

It is another object of the present invention to provide an improved removable cap assembly that can be easily attached to and detached from a standard threaded bottle.

It is still another object of the present invention to provide an improved removable cap assembly that provides a relatively rigid support for a sipper tube.

It is yet another object of the present invention to provide an improved removable cap assembly that has multiple thread starts for use in conjunction with threaded bottle.

Thus, according to one embodiment of the invention, a removable cap assembly comprising a cap, a stopper and a sipper tube is provided. The cap has a curved side wall which has an inner and outer surface. From this wall extends a top portion. A boss extends perpendicularly from the top portion. The boss has a bottom portion and a top portion. A circumferential rib extends perpendicularly from the top portion of the boss. The boss and define an opening in the cap. A stopper is provided that is dimensioned to seal the opening of the cap. The stopper is maintained in the cap by the circumferential rib. The stopper includes a disc-shaped base and a cylindrical wall portion that extends therefrom. Additionally, a first groove that is dimensioned to receive the bottom portion of the boss, is positioned in the base around the wall portion. Also, a second circumferential groove is positioned in the top portion of the wall portion. This second groove is dimensioned to receive the circumferential rib. The stopper has a hole for receiving a sipper tube.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The subject matter regarded as the invention is particularly pointed out and distinctly claimed in the concluding

portion of the specification. The invention, however, both as to organization and method of operation, together with features, objects, and advantages thereof may best be understood by reference to the following detailed description when read with the accompanying drawings in which:

FIG. 1 is an exploded perspective view of a removable cap assembly constructed in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 2a is a cross sectional view depicting the cap of FIG. 1 detached from a standard threaded bottle, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 2b is a cross sectional view depicting the stopper of FIG. 1 detached from a standard threaded bottle and configured to be coupled with the cap shown in FIG. 2a, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 3a is a cross sectional view depicting the cap detached from a standard threaded bottle, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 3b is a cross sectional view depicting the stopper detached from a standard threaded bottle and configured to be coupled with the cap shown in FIG. 3a, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 4a is a cross sectional view depicting the cap detached from a standard threaded bottle, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 4b is a cross sectional view depicting the stopper detached from a standard threaded bottle and configured to be coupled with the cap shown in FIG. 4a, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 5a is a cross sectional view depicting the cap detached from a standard threaded bottle, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 5b is a cross sectional view depicting the stopper detached from a standard threaded bottle and configured to be coupled with the cap shown in FIG. 5a, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 6a is a cross sectional view depicting the cap detached from a standard threaded bottle, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 6b is a cross sectional view depicting the stopper detached from a standard threaded bottle and configured to be coupled with the cap shown in FIG. 6a, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 7a is front view of a standard bottle, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 7b is a top view of the standard bottle shown in FIG. 7a, in accordance with another embodiment of the invention;

FIG. 8a is a cross sectional of a plug detached from the stopper shown in FIG. 4b, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention; and

FIG. 8b is a cross sectional of a plug inserted into the stopper shown in FIG. 4b, in accordance with one embodiment of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with one embodiment, the present invention is directed to a removable cap assembly 10. The salient features of the present invention, according to one embodiment, are shown in FIG. 1. Although not limited thereto, assembly 10 includes a sipper tube 20, a cap 30, and a stopper 40 that, together, can be coupled to a bottle mouth 50. The stopper fits in the cap to help provide a water tight

sealing device for covering mouth 50. Tube 20 is then held by stopper 40 to provide an animal feeding bottle.

Sipper 20 can be one of many commercially available and well-known tube shaped devices that are designed to dispense small amounts of liquid on demand. The simplest of these devices, shown in FIG. 1, includes a vertical portion 22 and an angled portion 24 that is bent about an elbow 23. Tube 20 has a hole 26 at its end. The hole is dimensioned so that a relatively small amount of liquid can flow when the liquids surface tension is broken. It is understood that many different types of sipper tubes can be used in conjunction with assembly 10 and the invention is not limited to use with tube 20 shown in FIG. 1.

Cap 30 is preferably formed of plastic, but it can also be formed from metal or any other appropriate material. Cap 30 includes a curved side wall 37. As shown in FIG. 1, wall 37 may include serrations on its outer surface in order to provide an improved gripping surface for a user. The inner surface of wall 37 is formed with threads so that cap 30 can be attached to bottle mouth 30. Extending from wall 37 is a top portion 32 of cap 30. Now considering FIG. 2a along with FIG. 1, a boss 34 extends perpendicularly from portion 32 and together they form a T-shape in cross section. Also, a circumferential rib 36 extends from the top portion of boss 34 and together they form an L-shape in cross section. A rigid cylindrical opening is defined by rib 36 that, as discussed below, is dimensioned to receive part of stopper 40. The opening is large enough so that sipper tube 20 may pass there through. Boss 34 and rib 36 serve multiple functions. Besides being configured to hold stopper 40, they cause the entire structure of cap 30 to be more rigid. Other function and advantages of this design will be discussed below.

Stopper 40 is formed from rubber, or a material with similar properties, and includes a disk-shaped base 42. A cylindrical wall portion 46 rises from the center of base 42 and has a hole 49 which extends through the stopper as can be seen in FIG. 2b. A first groove 44 encircles wall portion 46 in base 42. Groove 44 is dimensioned to receive the bottom portion of boss 34 of cap 30. A second groove 48 is located on wall portion 46 in a position that corresponds to rib 36 of cap 30. In one embodiment, a channel 45 with an upper surface 60 and a lower surface 62 is formed along the bottom of base 42 and the surfaces are dimensioned to respectfully receive an upper surface 61 and inner surface 63 of bottle mouth 50. Described below are additional embodiments of cap 30 along with corresponding stoppers 40.

In the embodiment shown in FIGS. 3a and 3b, second groove 48 is located at the base of wall portion 46 in a position that corresponds to a rib 35 of cap 30. In this embodiment, rib 36 is extended and serves to enclose stopper 40 when stopper 40 is inserted into cap 30. This enclosure helps to prevent collection of dirt between stopper 40 and cap 30. As shown in FIGS. 8a and 8b, a plug 80 may be provided that is sized to frictionally fit within hole 49. While FIGS. 8a and 8b illustrate such a plug as it is used with stopper 40 shown in FIG. 4b, it is understood that plug 80 can be used with any of the stopper embodiments. Plug 80 is useful for sealing hole 49 when tube 20 has not yet been inserted into hole 49. Thus, should bottle 50 be filled with liquid before tube 20 is inserted, plug 80 can be used to prevent spillage and evaporation of the contents of bottle 50. This is useful in at least two circumstances. Namely, it is often the case that bottles must be filled but they are not immediately needed. Also, at times bottles are used without sipper tubes. Instead bottles are drilled with side feeding holes that can be accessed by an animal. In this instance, it

is desirable to completely seal the bottle. Plug **80** allows for both of these contingencies.

In an additional embodiment, as shown in FIGS. **4a** and **4b**, wall portion **46** of stopper **40** is cone-shaped and therefore has a smaller lower diameter as compared to its second ridge **48**. However, cap **30** includes rib **36** which is designed to contain stopper **40**. Instead, boss **34** of cap **30** is also cone-shaped to complement wall portion **46** of stopper **40**.

In another embodiment, as shown in FIGS. **5a** and **5b**, wall portion **46** of stopper **40** has threads **41** disposed on its outer surface which are configured to engage threads **35** disposed on boss **34** of cap **30**. In this embodiment, wall portion **46** lacks second ridge **48**. However, cap **30** includes rib **36** which is designed to contain stopper **40**.

In yet another embodiment, as shown in FIGS. **6a** and **6b**, wall portion **46** of stopper **40** includes one or more depressions **43** in the form of half-spheres, quarter-spheres, cones, or any other appropriate shape, that are dimensioned to receive corresponding protuberances **39** that are disposed on boss **34**. Alternatively, protuberances may be disposed on stopper **40** and depressions may be disposed on boss **34**. Once again, in this embodiment, wall portion **46** lacks second ridge **48**. However, cap **30** includes rib **36** which is designed to contain stopper **40**.

Now turning more specifically to FIGS. **2a** and **2b** in addition to FIG. **1**, an explanation can be given of the manner in which assembly **10** is used. Stopper **40** is fit into cap **30** by forcing part of wall portion **46** through the opening formed by boss **34** and rib **36**. The diameter of portion **46** is wider than the diameter of the opening made by rib **36**. Thus, in one embodiment, beveling on the top of portion **46** aids in forcing portion **46** through the opening. Also, the material itself is capable of being compressed and subsequently retains its original shape. Forcing the top of portion **46** through the opening allows rib **36** of cap **30** to engage second groove **48** of stopper **40**. Likewise, boss **34** engages groove **44** of stopper **40**. With stopper **40** in this position, base **42** is adjacent to the top portion **32**. Finally sipper **20** can be inserted into opening **49**, where it remains in place by friction fit.

As with the embodiment shown in FIGS. **2a** and **2b**, structural features of the embodiments shown in FIGS. **3**, **4**, **5**, and **6** allow stopper to remain engaged to cap **30**. Turning first to the embodiment shown in FIG. **4**, cone-shaped wall portion **46** must be forced into complementary shaped opening formed by boss **34**. Because the upper diameter of wall portion **46** is larger than the lower diameter of the opening formed by boss **34**, stopper **40** remains engaged to cap **30** unless force is applied to separate the two components.

In the embodiment shown in FIG. **5**, threads **41** on wall portion **46** of stopper **40** engage threads **35** on boss **34** of cap **30**, so that stopper **40** is connected to cap **30**. Stopper **40** is screwed on to cap until base **42** meets the underside of top portion **32** of cap **30**. In the embodiment shown in FIG. **6** a multitude of protuberances **39** are positioned to mate with depressions **43** so that stopper **40** remains attached to cap **30** when base **42** is adjacent to the underside of top portion **32**.

In one embodiment, cap **30** and stopper **40** are formed separately and then joined together as discussed above. Instead, stopper **40** may be molded using a previously formed cap **30** as a mold. In this instance, molten material is poured into cap **30** and sets to form stopper **40**. This method can be used for any of the above embodiments of

stopper **40** and cap **30**. Thus, in the embodiment shown in FIGS. **5a** and **5b**, stopper **40** would take on a shape including threads **41**.

For any of the previously described embodiments, when cap **30** is clamped down around bottle neck **50**, the underside of base **42** of stopper **40** compresses to provide a biasing force to separate cap **30** from the bottle neck. So that stopper **40** seals against bottle **50** along two surfaces, as shown in FIG. **1**, lower surface **62** of groove **45** engages inner surface **63** of bottle **40**, and upper surface **60** engages upper surface **61** of bottle **40**. In one embodiment, as shown in FIGS. **7a** and **7b**, four discreet threads **55** are disposed on bottle **50** and four corresponding threads are disposed on cap **30**. It is understood that any number of threads may be disposed on bottle **50** and cap **30**. The use of more than one continuous thread allows cap **30** to be tightened on bottle **50** with less than 360 degrees of turning. And, the use of multiple threads helps to create a seal along the full 360 degrees of cap **30**. Attachment of assembly **10** to bottle **50** causes a tension fit and positive engagement of threads **34** and **54** so that the cap need only be rotated a relatively small amount to maintain a safe, tight fit. Furthermore, because the material is in a compressed state and seeks to expand, it provides a friction surface against the bottom of the cap further preventing any inadvertent loosening of the cap during use. Therefore, a tight seal is provided without twisting to engage all of the neck threads. This seal is improved by the relatively large surface area of stopper **40** that is in contact with cap **40**. As compared to prior art assemblies, this surface area is increased by introducing boss **34** and rib **36**.

At least one major advantage of the design herein described, is the cylinder shaped opening that is generally defined by boss **34** of cap **30**. Unlike prior art caps, boss **34** provides lateral support for stopper **40**. This support minimizes the range of motion of tube **20**. In the prior art, a lack of support resulted in tube **20** being free to move in relatively unrestricted manner. This in turn may result in loosening the tube in the stopper. Also, the additional surface contact between cap **30** and stopper **40** serves to assure a water-tight seal. Another advantage of the presently described device is that the width of the opening formed in cap **30** for stopper **40** is relatively smaller than prior art openings. This is another factor which helps to improve the overall rigidity of assembly **10**. Preferably the width of the opening is less than two times the height of the cylinder forming the opening. This further assures rigidity of the structure. Also disclosed have been features that were designed improve the overall cleanliness characteristics of a bottle feeder.

While only certain features of the invention have been illustrated and described herein, many modifications, substitutions, changes or equivalents will now occur to those skilled in the art. It is therefore, to be understood that this application is intended to cover all such modifications and changes that fall within the true spirit of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A removable cap and bottle assembly comprising:
 - a cap having a curved side wall having an inner surface and an outer surface, a top portion extending from said curved side wall, a boss extending perpendicularly from said top portion, said boss having a first thread formed on an inside surface, a circumferential rib extending perpendicularly from said top of said boss, said boss and rib defining an opening in said cap, said opening having a width and a height, said inner surface of said cap further having a second at least two threads disposed thereon;

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a stopper dimensioned to seal said opening, said stopper having a hole therein configured to allow a fluid to flow therethrough, said stopper being maintained in said cap by said boss and rib, said stopper including a disc shaped base, a cylindrical wall portion extending from said base having a third thread formed on an outside surface corresponding to said first thread on said inside surface of said boss, a groove in said base surrounding said wall portion, said groove dimensioned to receive said boss; and

a bottle having a mouth portion with an inner surface and an outer surface, said outer surface having a fourth at least two threads disposed thereon corresponding to said second threads disposed on said inner surface of

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said side wall of said cap, so that when said cap is screwed on to said mouth of said bottle, a compression seal is formed along an entire circumference of said cap and said bottle with less than a full turn of said cap.

2. The assembly as claimed in claim 1, wherein said threads disposed on said outer surface of said bottle are discrete.

3. The assembly as claimed in claim 2, wherein four of said threads are disposed on said inner surface of said cap and four of said corresponding threads are disposed on said outer surface of said bottle.

* * * * *

UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

PATENT NO. : 6,786,179 B2
DATED : September 7, 2004
INVENTOR(S) : Ver Hage

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

Title page.
Item [73], Assignee, should read -- **Ver Hage Enterprises** --.

Signed and Sealed this

Eighth Day of March, 2005

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray dotted background. The signature reads "Jon W. Dudas" in a cursive style.

JON W. DUDAS

Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office